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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000964

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SUBJECT: FRENCH DELAYING TACTICS ON EU DESIGNATION OF HIZBALLAH

REF: A. STATE 26062

[1](#)B. PARIS 879

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Despite multiple appeals from the U.S. and Israel, the GoF appears likely to seek a delay in EU designation of Hizballah as a terrorist organization at the EU Clearinghouse meetings February 16. The chief GoF preoccupation appears to be the perceived complicating effect which EU designation could have on Lebanon's spring parliamentary elections, a concern which appears to have deepened in the aftermath of the assassination of former PM Hariri. MFA contacts also downplayed Palestinian support for our message, claiming that while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "mentioned" the Hizballah with French FM Barnier last week, he did not press the point. Israeli embassy contacts told us that President Chirac told Israeli FM Shalom February 15 that he agreed that Hizballah is a terrorist organization, but EU designation should not take place until well after Lebanon's elections, perhaps not before October. While the French response is discouraging, at least the GoF appears to be moving in a positive direction, from "whether" to designate Hizballah to "when." End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (C) We discussed ref (a) talking points urging French support for EU terrorism list designation of Hizballah with MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Christian Jouret February 14, and later that day with Presidential Technical Advisor on the Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche. (Note: As reported ref b, DCM raised the EU Hizballah designation with FM Barnier's Cabinet Director Vimont February 10. NEA A/S Burns made similar points during a meeting with MFA A/S-equivalent for Middle East/North Africa Jean-Francois Thibault and Boche February 10. End note.) Jouret, rather than responding with the usual French arguments on why Hizballah designation was inadvisable, stated that the GoF was "in a process of reflection" on the issue. He added that the MFA had submitted a two-option decision paper to the Elysee in advance of the February 16 EU Clearinghouse meeting, proposing either: 1) to support a full EU ban on the entire organization, or 2) to seek a delay in the Clearinghouse decision. Jouret conceded that he believed "option two" was the likely course, largely because the GoF did not want to complicate the internal situation in Lebanon in advance of spring parliamentary elections. (Note: This discussion took place after initial reports of the February 14 bombing in Beirut, but prior to confirmation that PM Hariri had been killed in the explosion.) Poloff, in response, underlined ref (a) points on Hizballah's active undermining of the Palestinian leadership, stressing that Hizballah threatened the very fragile prospects for Middle East peace which France had described as the most important issue facing both sides of the Atlantic. Jouret replied by questioning the degree of Palestinian support for our arguments; he conceded that Palestinian President Abbas had "mentioned" the Hizballah issue to FM Barnier during the latter's February 7-8 visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories, however he claimed that Abbas did not press the point with the GoF in the same manner as had the U.S. and Israel.

[1](#)3. (C) Israeli Embassy Political Counselor Ella Aphek (protect) provided us a brief readout of the Hizballah-related discussion during visiting Israeli FM Silvan Shalom's February 14 meeting with Chirac. She confirmed that Shalom's main objective had been to press Chirac to support EU designation of Hizballah, and stressed that France was the key holdout among the EU. Chirac reportedly responded that, Hizballah designation is a "complex issue," and that he agreed with Shalom that Hizballah is a terrorist organization, however the EU designation should not take place before Lebanon's spring parliamentary elections, perhaps not before October. Based on the Chirac-Shalom discussion, Aphek concluded that there would be no breakthroughs at the February 16 Clearinghouse meeting.

[1](#)4. (C) We reviewed ref (a) talking points with Presidential Advisor Dominique Boche late February 14, a discussion which took place after confirmation of PM Hariri's assassination in Beirut. Boche described the Presidency as still reflecting on the EU designation of Hizballah, which he said would be considered on two main criteria: 1) Hizballah's military and

terrorist activities, and, 2) the "regional context," specifically the preparation for Lebanon's spring parliamentary elections. On the latter point, Boche said that a sudden EU decision to designate Hizballah could make Lebanon's Shi'a community feel more "pressured" in the runup to elections, in a political scene already destabilized by the assassination of former-PM Hariri. In closing, Boche stressed that a decision on EU designation would take time and considerable reflection, and that the GoF would have to discuss the matter in detail with EU partners.

15. (C) Comment: While GoF officials avoided responding with a direct no to our points and sought to emphasize that the GoF was still deliberating the issue, we see all indications pointing towards a likely French effort to seek a delay in Clearinghouse designation of Hizballah until well after Lebanon's parliamentary elections. Despite our efforts to focus on the Hizballah's support for Palestinian terrorist groups, the GoF continues to see this issue primarily within the framework of Lebanon and the fragile UNSCR 1559 implementation process. Although the French response is discouraging, at least the GoF appears to be moving from the question of "whether" to designate Hizballah to "when" it would be most appropriate. The detailed and specific points which Washington is preparing for release to EU governments would be helpful in pressing the GoF to move towards designation; we note, though, that unlike other EU capitals, the French did not ask for this information. End comment.

Leach